Bolstering U.S. Intelligence
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Washington, D.C.
07 May 2007

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States began focusing on organizing its response to the threat posed by radical Islamists. But officials found a critical shortage of trained and experienced intelligence and counterterrorism personnel. What is the United States doing to fill the personnel gap?

In the days of the Cold War, recruiting people to work in any of America's intelligence agencies was, in keeping with the spy world's secretive nature, usually a quiet, low-key affair. But things have changed in the post 9/11 world. Nowadays, television advertisements are wooing prospective spies, asking them, "Are you a person of purpose, patience, professionalism, with curiosity and integrity? Are you ready to make a world of difference? Be a part of the National Clandestine Service at the Central Intelligence Agency. The C.I.A. The work of a nation. The center of intelligence."

The threat of terrorism has sparked American intelligence agencies to ratchet up efforts to recruit the next generation of analysts and clandestine operators with professionally produced TV ads and slick websites.

Downsizing and Rebuilding

The ranks of intelligence agencies were slashed in the 1990s. The euphoria of the end of the Cold War sparked a wave of budget cuts. Bill Nolte, former deputy assistant director for analysis at the C.I.A., says there was a virtual hiring freeze across the intelligence community. Additionally, many older analysts and clandestine operators retired, and their positions were not filled.

To underscore the point, Nolte cites a startling statistic that has developed since former director George Tenet left the agency. "George Tenet has been gone from [the] C.I.A. for what, three years. And something like 50-percent of the work force did not work for George Tenet. Those are numbers that go all over the intelligence community. It is kind of startling to think that half, or something close - - I do not know if it is half, a third, but it is still a huge number - - something between 30 to 50 percent of the C.I.A. workforce, has come on board since George Tenet left," says Nolte.

In the aftermath of 9/11, several investigative bodies and commissions criticized intelligence agencies for failing to intercept the terrorist plot. The intelligence community was also battered for erroneous judgments on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability.

In 2004, President Bush ordered a 50 percent increase in the number of intelligence analysts and the creation of a joint National Counterterrorism Center.

Bill Nolte says the intelligence community has been up and down, with personnel increases in the 1980s, a sharp drop in the 1990s, and now another personnel surge. He says that has created a

severe shortage of middle managers to mentor and teach the new young people now coming on board.

"This thing looked like a roller coaster. And the problem was that suddenly after 9/11 you were hiring all these people, and there was no middle management, there was no first-line supervision in terms of, where were the people with seven to 10 years in who you would expect to be first-line supervisors, to be the mentors and teachers and trainers for this new generation," says Nolte.

Mentoring New Analysts

Although personnel figures are classified, officials say intelligence agencies have in many cases relied on contractors to fill the gaps. At the National Counterterrorism Center, the central information clearinghouse for terrorist-related intelligence, nearly 95 percent of the people are on temporary duty from their home agency.

The retired admiral who heads the Counterterrorism Center, Scott Redd, says more than half of the analysts at the Center have less than three years of experience. "The intelligence community, most of the national security community, had decreased substantially - - the 'peace dividend,' if you will - - in the 1990s. So we had to 'plus up'. In some case it was taking analysts who were trained analysts, but who had been working in other subjects, and we brought them into the counterterrorism piece," says Redd. "And they get up to speed, but they still have to learn the facts, if you will, of counter-terrorism. And in the other case, we are bringing a lot of bright young analysts in and training them from the start."

The Future of Intelligence

A former associate deputy director of operations for the C.I.A., Rob Richer, says counterterrorism, or C.T. as he refers to it, is the overriding issue and thus the hot career path in intelligence now. But Richer, who also took over personnel matters for the clandestine service only two months before the September 11 attacks, says there are still competing intelligence priorities that continue to tax the work force in the midst of its expansion.

"C.T. is the focus; we cannot have another New York. At the same time, we are being told, 'You need to surge people into Iraq, get prepared to support the operations in Iraq, or at least [intelligence] collection in Iraq. And, by the way, don't forget we have to track what the Chinese are doing, the Indo-Pak crisis, North Korea's development of a nuclear weapon,' and the list goes on. No one was taking priorities off the table. They did push C.T. and, right next to it, Iraq, to the top of the table. But no one said, stop doing any particular mission," says Richer.

So the Help Wanted signs are still out at the C.I.A., the F.B.I., the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the rest of the 16 agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community.

These stories was first broadcast on the English news program, *VOA News Now***.**